



A DESCRIPTION OF THE

❧ BIRDS OF ONTARIO, ❧

—BY—

THOMAS MCILWRAITH.

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ON BIRDS AND BIRD MATTERS.

BY THOS. MCILWRAITH.

Although the subjects brought before the Association during the present session have been both numerous and varied, it is somewhat remarkable that no branch of the animal kingdom has yet come up for consideration. With the view of introducing this department of Natural History, and thinking that it might be a pleasing change for you to pass from the consideration of sewage and other unsavory, though all-important subjects, which have recently engaged your attention, I have availed myself of the opportunity offered, of asking you to spend an hour with me among the birds. The subject is a very attractive one, the objects which it embraces being always near us, varied in form, beautiful in color, and possessed of the most wonderful instincts, to mark the exercise of which is a continual source of delight.

A treatise on Ornithology, in the highest meaning of the term, is beyond the scope of this paper, as it would require us to go back half-way through the geological periods, where we would find the early forms of bird life very different from those we see around us at present.

It is not my purpose to follow the subject in this direction, nor to attempt giving you a highly scientific dissertation, made unintelligible by the use of unpronounceable technicalities. I would much

prefer taking a cursory glance at what has been written about American birds from the date of the earliest records we have on the subject up to the present time,—calling your attention to a few of the more remarkable species found near this city; and leaving with the Association a list of all the birds which have been observed in *Ontario*, with special reference to those found in our near neighborhood. This list, I hope, may be useful to the rising generation of Ornithologists, serving as time rolls on, to show by comparison what changes take place in the number and distribution of the different species. So long ago as 1860 I read a similar paper, and presented to this Association a similar list, which subsequently appeared in the *Canadian Journal* for that year; but so many changes have, since that time, been made in the nomenclature, and in the arrangement of the different groups, that we would not now be able to recognize the birds by the names then given them. These frequent changes have been a constant source of annoyance to the student, who, after getting fairly familiar with the system, and having occasion to leave it for a short time, may find on his return that he will have to begin all over again and learn to recognize his old friends by new names—an experience which is certainly very discouraging, and yet when we consider how these changes are brought about it seems hardly possible for the present to avoid the difficulty.

To such as have given even a limited amount of attention to the subject, it will be apparent that among birds there exist certain natural groups or families, the members of which are related to each other. Classification undertakes to separate and set apart each of those groups by itself, under a special family name, and did we know all the birds in existence, and in what ways they resemble each other, and in what ways they differ, the work would be comparatively easy; but unfortunately, here as elsewhere, human knowledge is incomplete, and the results are defective for want of proper data. Besides the difficulties arising from defective knowledge of the subject, it is evident that the arrangement of the groups can be carried out in different ways, as viewed from different standpoints: One may take as the basis of his system the formation of the bill and feet, while another, ignoring these points, may class together only such birds as resemble each other in their anatomical structure,

and each of these systematists having his followers writing and publishing under the system they favor most, produce the confusion so much complained of.

The subject of classification is now under consideration by a committee of the most able living Ornithologists, and it is to be hoped that their labors will result in the arrangement of a system of universal application which will be practically permanent.

As regards American birds, there are at present two different lists of names before the public,—one by Dr. Elliot Coues, a most accomplished scholar and brilliant writer, and another by Mr. Robt. Ridgeway, the accurate, careful curator of the bird department of the Smithsonian Institution. Either of these might be quite sufficient were the other out of the way, but having *two* only leads to confusion.

In most of the older systems it was customary to place the birds of prey first on the list, in consideration of their great size and strength, the noble (?) eagle occupying a place in the foremost ranks; better acquaintance with these birds shows us, however, that they do not possess the noble qualities attributed to them, that they are slovenly and irregular in their habits, often gorging themselves with carrion, and remaining for days in a state of dozing stupidity till the calls of hunger again force them out in search of things new and old.

I think it was Professor Liljeborg, of Upsala, who first advocated the view that the birds entitled to the highest rank should be those which are possessed of the greatest amount of nervous irritability, and have all bird-like peculiarities most fully developed. When we consider that these peculiarities include swimming on the water, hopping on the ground, perching on trees, hopping nimbly from branch to branch and making their presence known by their characteristic and melodious voices, we readily see the justice of giving the first place to the passerres, or perching birds, all of which have a much higher organization than the birds of prey. This arrangement is adopted generally by both Dr. Coues and Mr. Ridgeway, yet they differ slightly in detail, one giving the first place to our familiar garden songster, the Robin, and the other to the Wood Thrush, a handsome bird of shy and retiring habits, seldom seen except in its favorite haunts in the bush. These and similar

differences occur all through the arrangements which we hope soon to see reconciled.

The birds of North America are understood to be all such as are found north of the Mexican border, and it is quite interesting to look back and observe at what rate the published record of species has increased, as well as the causes which have led to these results. No doubt many of the common species were observed by the early settlers in the country, and while raising their primitive homes with their minds still full of memories of the old land, finding a bird with a red breast coming familiarly near, he would naturally get the name of "Robin" after the familiar "Robin Redbreast" who was so much a favorite at home, but for some such circumstance our Robin might with greater propriety have been called the Red-breasted Thrush.

In these early days the hardy pioneers would have little time to devote to the study of the birds, and still less to record the result of such observation, but as the country became better known, and the facilities for reaching it were increased, travellers, adventurers, missionaries and others, made frequent visits from foreign countries, and as usual took home glowing accounts of the natural productions of the new land. Dr. Coues, who has made a careful search for records of this description gives in his new "Key to North American Birds" the names of quite a number of books published between the years 1600 and 1700, in which special reference is made to the birds of the districts visited by the writers. The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, etc., by Mark Catesby, published in parts, is the first in which any definite number of birds is mentioned. It was brought out in 1731, and by taking into account some additional species named in the appendix, the total number is brought up to 113.

In 1771, I. R. Forster published a tract entitled "A Catalogue of the Animals of North America," in which he mentions 302 birds, but they are not described, nor even named correctly.

In 1787, Pennant and Latham followed, the result of whose combined labors was the description of 500 species of American birds.

About this time Gmelin was busy compiling and transcribing the works of his predecessors, but he did not discover anything new

in the connection, and according to Dr. Coues, it is to Cassin, Edwards, Forster, Pennant, Latham and Bartram, that the credit belongs of making North American Ornithology what it was at this period.

The name of Bartram will always be respected from his connection with Wilson, yet Bartram himself was an advanced Ornithologist for the time, and published a list of the birds of the Eastern United States, naming many species as new, which, it is believed, were credited by subsequent authors to Wilson.

Prior to 1794 Alexander Wilson lived in his native town of Paisley, in Renfrewshire, Scotland, where he followed his father's steps as a hand-loom weaver. For a time he turned packman, but the venture was not a success. He had also corrected the Muses, and had written several pieces which were so well received as for a time to be attributed to Burns. In 1789, while carrying the pack, he added to his wares a prospectus of a volume of his poems, in which he said "if the *pedlar* should fail to be favored with sale, then I hope you'll encourage the *poet*." But he did not succeed in either capacity, and in 1794 he came to America, where he was once more a weaver, a pedlar, and a schoolmaster. It was here on the banks of the Schuylkill that he enjoyed the society of Bartram, which was no doubt instrumental in deciding his future course in life, and in all his troubles he received sympathy and encouragement from this venerable friend and ardent lover of nature. The period of Wilson's labors here was bright, but brief. The first volume of his work appeared in 1808, and he died in 1813, before the work was finished. With a cheap gun, hardly safe, with which to secure his specimens, and only common paper on which to trace his illustrations, he followed the subject with enthusiasm and perseverance which earned for him a reputation far ahead of all composers at the time; even now he is regarded as the father of American Ornithology, and many of his descriptions of the birds are still quoted as the best which have appeared on the subject. After the untimely death of Wilson the work was carried on and completed by his associate Oud, who brought out the eighth and ninth volumes in 1814. In this work about 280 species of birds were fully and faithfully described, and many of them shown in colored illustrations.

In 1824 Prince Lucien Bonaparte contributed to the *Journal* of the Philadelphia Academy, a series of critical articles on Wilson's American Ornithology. These referred chiefly to the nomenclature, a subject to which Wilson paid but little attention. During the ten years succeeding the above date, several editions of Wilson's work appeared, each containing the changes in the nomenclature suggested by Bonaparte, and having descriptions of such new species as had from time to time been brought to light. Bonaparte's principal work was his "American Ornithology," published in 1833, in which the number of species described was 366. In 1838 he published in London his "Geographical and Comparative List of the Birds of Europe and North America," in which the number of species was farther raised to 471. The *Fauna Boreali-Americana* was now in course of publication. The volume descriptive of the birds, which appeared in 1831, not only described many hitherto unknown species, but contained a vast amount of valuable information regarding the nests, eggs, and habits of the birds in their northern homes, about which little or nothing had been known.

In the meantime John James Audubon, a man of high culture, ample means, and a large amount of material to start with, was busy preparing his great work, the first volume of which appeared in 1827, but was not completed till 1839. The number of birds described was 506, nearly every species being shown in a colored illustration.

The attention of Ornithologists was now turned to the west, and a most valuable contribution was made to the subject by Mr. John Cassin, who published in 1856 a beautiful book entitled "Illustration of the Birds of California," illustrated with fifty colored plates.

In 1858 appeared the celebrated 9th volume of "Pacific Railroad Reports," which overturned the whole previous form of the subject. The number of specimens sent in by the different surveying parties was very great, and nearly all different species from those already known in the east. These, with the reports referring to them, were placed in the hands of Professor Baird, who with the assistance of Messrs. Cassin and Geo. N. Lawrence, revised the whole subject, and introducing for the sake of comparison the eastern species already known, made the volume a complete

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exposition of all that was known up to that time of the birds of America, north of Mexico, and bringing up the list of described species to 744.

In 1874 Dr. Coues, then a surgeon in the U. S. Army, published a check list, which included such additional species as had been added since the former date, bringing up the number to 778.

In 1880 Mr. Ridgeway, in making out a catalogue of the specimens in the Smithsonian Institute labelled as North American, found that they numbered 924, but it is thought that many were thus included which were collected beyond the limits.

In 1882 Dr. Coues published a second edition of his check list, in which the number is increased to 888, and in his new key published in 1884, the number is reduced to 878. So the numbers stand at present, and as we do not now expect to have many new species added, any change which takes place will probably be a reduction, caused by condensing the groups which many think are at present too much divided.

Nothing of late years has happened so well calculated to advance the interest of this subject, as the result of a meeting which was held in the Museum of Natural History, in the Central Park, New York, in September, 1883. The meeting, which was called by circular, was composed of a few of the leading amateur and professional Ornithologists of North America. There were present one from Ontario, one from New Brunswick, and about twenty from different States in the Union. The meeting was a most enjoyable one, as it brought together many who were known to each other by correspondence, and yet had never personally met. It remained in session for three days, with Dr. Coues as Chairman, and Mr E. P. Bicknell as Secretary. The proceedings resulted in the formation of an American Ornithologist's Union, now familiarly known as the A. O. U., with a constitution and by-laws similar to those of the British association of similar name. Professor I. A. Allen, of Cambridge, Mass., was elected President, and Dr. C. H. Merriam, of Locust Grove, N. Y., Secretary. Committees were formed to report on the following subjects at next meeting:— Nomenclature and Classification, Migration, Osteology, on the desirability or otherwise of encouraging the English Sparrow, and Distribution of Species. At the close it was decided, in consider-



ation of the importance of the proceedings and of the enjoyment they had afforded, to have all those present photographed in a group, which was subsequently carried out successfully by Bogardus, of Broadway.

At the *second* meeting of the Union, held in the same place in September, 1884, the committee on Nomenclature reported progress, but had not yet completed their labors. The hope was expressed that by next September a system of classification and nomenclature will be agreed on, which will be practically permanent, and save the annoyance arising from the frequent changes already referred to.

The committee on the desirability or otherwise of encouraging the English Sparrow, reported that they had taken evidence on the subject from every State where he was located, and the vote was almost unanimously against him; but he is here now, and the committee taking a merciful view of his case, did not at present recommend any violent measures for his extinction, but suggest that no more houses be put up for the accommodation of the birds, that those who have been in the habit of affording them food and shelter should discontinue doing so, and that in all States where they have not yet appeared every means should be used to keep them out. If thus left to themselves for a few years, it would be seen whether the severity of the climate or other causes would be sufficient to keep them within proper bounds; if not, an aggressive movement could then be made against them.

On behalf of the committee on Migration, Dr. Merriam reported that on taking office as Chairman, he had at once issued circulars calling for observers to note and report on the movements of the birds during the season of migration, and that he had now nearly 700 at different points in the States and Canada; besides which every lighthouse keeper in both countries had instruction from their departments to furnish a record of all birds destroyed by flying against the glass at night, with the date and name of birds so killed as far as possible,

The amount of information furnished on these subjects was so great that the Chairman found it impossible to present it in proper shape without the use of maps, which he hoped within a short time to be able to supply. He presented an abstract from the reports referring to the movements of one or two representative birds from the time they crossed the southern boundary till they reached their

northern limits. But the most interesting facts relating to the subject were brought forward to show the great destruction which takes place among the birds by flying against the lighthouses. It is known that migrations take place mostly during the night, the day being spent seeking rest and refreshment. The smaller birds do not like to cross the lakes, but are found in great numbers flitting along the shores, or following the course of the larger rivers, the Mississippi valley in this way becoming the great highway of the travellers during the season of migration. By looking at the map of the State of Michigan it will be observed that northern bound birds entering that State from the south, find themselves hemmed in between lakes Huron and Michigan, and naturally gather into a *cul de sac* to cross at the straits of Mackinac, which they no doubt do in vast numbers. "In Lake Huron, at the eastern end of the straits, and midway between the shores, lies Spectacle Reef, on which is erected a lighthouse eighty-six feet above the water level. The light is of the second order, and shows alternately a red and white flash every 29 seconds, which is seen in clear weather at a distance of sixteen and a half miles. The lighthouse is surrounded by a wooden platform 85 feet square. The keeper of the light, Mr. William Marshall, has been there seven years, and states that during the season of migration on misty and rainy nights large numbers of birds strike and are killed. On one morning he picked *one hundred and fifty* on the pier surrounding the tower, and thinks that ten times that number fall outside the platform into the water. A package of these which were forwarded for identification, showed them to be such birds as we are accustomed to see passing north during the spring. A similar report furnished by the keeper of the lighthouse at Sombrero Key, Florida Reefs, shows that as many as 200 sometimes strike during one night." The circulars of instructions and tabular forms are again in the hands of observers for the spring work of 1885, and farther south many entries have no doubt already been made. Profiting by the experience of last year, the work has now been better systematized, and more information will be gained with less trouble. In the course of a year or two we will no doubt be able to say where all the species spend the winter, when they leave their winter quarters for the north, at what rate they travel, and how far north they go ; but whether we will find out what excites within the birds the desire to migrate, and how they

are able to carry out these desires with such precision and regularity, is very doubtful.

Having thus reviewed the subject generally, if we turn our attention homeward we find that in an ornithological point of view Hamilton is favorably situated, its surroundings being such as will attract birds of all classes. In the country we find highly cultivated fields alternating with clumps of mixed bush and rocky gullies, while the bay, with its sandy shores and marshy inlets, provides ample food and shelter for the waders and swimmers. Here, too, we are favorably situated for observing the movements of the migratory armies in the spring, and have done so with results similar to those already described.

Pressing on toward the north through Ohio early in May, the birds meet the south shore of Lake Erie, and following its course crowd in perfect swarms along the Niagara River till they strike the shore of Lake Ontario at right angles. Here, most likely, a separation takes place, some following the line of the lake shore eastward, while the greater number most likely take the western route, and are seen flitting from bush to bush along the beach, where for a few days in May they almost rival the sandflies in number, and that is saying a good deal. That some attempt to cross the lake is evident from their frequently flying on board vessels which are passing up and down at that season, and the fact of these individuals being generally much exhausted, would imply that many fall short of the north shore and perish in the water. The spring of 1882 is memorable as one in which the birds on their northern journey received a severe and sudden check. On the 9th of May the season was unusually favorable, and the migratory wave was rolling along at its height, when a severe north-easter set in during the night accompanied with cold, drizzling, sleety rain. This forced the birds to descend from upper air and seek shelter wherever it could be found. In the morning my garden was full of warblers, all in their glowing nuptial dress, but dull and draggled, not knowing where to turn. I collected more rare specimens in my garden that morning than I ever did anywhere else in the same time. This would seem to be an unfortunate resting-place for the birds, but others fared quite as bad elsewhere, for when a little daughter of Mr. Smith, who keeps the Ocean House, went down to play by the lake shore in the morning, she returned in a few minutes with her

pinafore full of little dead birds which were being washed up from the lake all along the shore. In former years it was the custom with those who wished a collection of birds to have them mounted and placed in glass cases, but the mounting in very many instances failed to satisfy those who were familiar with the appearance of the birds in life ; besides which they took up too much room, and always suffered by transportation. This mode is now practiced mostly by public museums, where the specimens remain permanently and are under the care of a curator. The plan now followed by amateur collectors is to skin and preserve the specimen, filling out the skin with cotton to about the natural size so as to make the bird look as if newly killed. In this way they are kept in trays in a cabinet, where they are easy of access for measurement or examination, besides which, through the facilities offered for transportation by mail, an exchange of duplicates can at very small cost be made by collectors, residing at far distant points. On the table there are now brought together in this way specimens from Alaska to Texas, and from New Brunswick to California, as well as many intermediate points.

The month of May, above all others in the year, is the one enjoyed by collectors, the birds being now arrayed in their richest dress, and excursions to the woods in pursuit of them offering so pleasing a change after our long, hard winter has passed away. There is no group of our small birds so interesting as the Warblers, which, though they do not differ much in size, yet vary greatly in plumage, some of them such as the Blackburnian and Black and Yellow being exceedingly beautiful, while others are so extremely rare everywhere that the securing of one is an event of the season. Among the latter class I may name the Cape May, of which I got two specimens at the Beach one morning in May, 1884.

The name of John Cassin has already been mentioned in this paper as a representative Ornithologist of his time. Hear what he says about the birds we are describing :—

"Bird collecting," says Mr. Cassin, "is the ultimate refinement, the *ne plus ultra* of all the sports of the field. It is attended with all the excitement, and requires all the skill of other shooting with a much higher degree of theoretical information, and consequent gratification in its exercise. Personal activity (not necessarily to be exerted over so great a space as in game bird shooting, but in a

much greater diversity of locality), coolness, steadiness of hand, quickness of eye and of ear—especially the latter; in fact all the accomplishments of a first-rate shot will be of service, and some of them are indispensable to successful collecting. The main reliance, however, is on the ear for the detection of birds by their notes, and involves a knowledge the more accurate and discriminating the better, which can only be acquired by experience, and always characterizes the true woodsman, whether naturalist or hunter.

“This ability is of incomparable value to the collector, whether in the tangled forest, the deep recesses of the swamp, on the sea coast, or in the clear woodlands, on mountain or prairie; it advises him of whatever birds may be there, and affords him a higher gratification, announcing the presence of a bird he does not know. We recognize no more exquisite pleasure than to hear in the woods the note of a bird that is new to us. It is in the latter case that the cultivated quickness of the eye of the experienced collector is especially important, and his coolness and steadiness of nerve is fully tested. It will not do to be flustered. But, in fact, all these qualities must be possessed for the acquirement of the smaller species of birds found in our woods. Some species, such as the Warblers, are constantly in motion in the pursuit of insects, and are most frequently met with in the tops of trees; they are, moreover, only to be killed with the finest shot, or they are spoiled for specimens. The obtaining of these little birds always requires the most careful and skilful shooting.”

With us the Warblers arrive with remarkable regularity about the 10th of May. Should the season be a late one, they may be observed at this time gleaning their scanty fare among the almost leafless branches; or again, if early, the leaves may be opening out by the first of the month, yet the little birds do not appear till their regular time. As the first flocks arrive they rest and recruit for a day or two, and then pass on to make room for others who arrive and take their places. So the stream flows on till the Queen's birthday (May 24). About this time the Black Poll arrives, and when it goes the season may be considered over, as it is always the last of this class to arrive in spring. Thrushes, Orioles, Tangers and Flycatchers are now all here in full life, and the busy collector can hardly spare time to sleep—if he does, it is to see flocks of desirable species arise before his excited vision, and not till the

middle of June, when the birds are all nesting, does he lay aside the gun and take time to count his treasures.

The Sparrows, as a class, are also well represented near the city. Some of them, such as the Fox Colored, White Crowned and White Throated, being very handsome birds which visit us in Spring and Fall, but do not remain during the summer or winter, the best known of this class being the English Sparrow, which has been looked upon as an outsider, yet it is here now for good (or bad, as the case may be), and is entitled to a place among the others of its class. In all lists of American birds at present it is very unpopular, the principal charges brought against it being that of eating the fruit buds and driving away our native birds. Some time ago I gave the result of my observations, which appeared elsewhere, but may be worth repeating here:—It was in the summer of 1874 that I first noticed a pair of these birds about the out houses, and in a few days they became quite familiar, having evidently made up their minds to stay with us. I made them welcome for old acquaintance sake, and thinking they would make good settlers was about to put up a house for them, but before my well-meant intentions were carried out it became apparent that they were providing for themselves in a manner quite characteristic.

On a peak of the stable was a box occupied by a pair of swallows who were at this time engaged in rearing their young, and of this box the sparrows seemed determined to get possession. The swallows resisted their attacks with great spirit, and, their outcries bringing a host of friends to their assistance, the intruders were for a time driven off, but it was only to return again with renewed energy and perseverance. The swallows were now sorely beset, as one had to remain on guard while the other went in search of supplies. Still they managed to hold the fort till the enemy, watching his opportunity, made a strategic movement from the rear and darted into the box quicker than I can tell it. He emerged again with a callow swallow hanging by the nape of the neck in his bill and dropped it on the ground below, and soon another followed amid the distressing cries of the swallows who, seeing their hopes so completely blighted, sat mute and mournful on the ridge of the house for a short time, and then went away from the place, leaving the sparrows in undisputed possession of the box, and there they remained and raised some young ones during the summer.

In the spring of the following year the numbers had increased, and they began to roost under the veranda round the house, which brought frequent complaints from the sanitary department, and protest was made against their being allowed to lodge there at all. Still, in view of the prospective riddance of insect pests from the garden, matters were arranged with the least possible disturbance to the birds, and we even stood by and saw them dislodge a pair of house wrens who had for years been in possession of a box fixed for them in an apple tree in the garden. So the second year wore on, no further notice being taken of the sparrows except that they were getting more numerous.

I had missed the sprightly song and lively manners of the wrens, and in the spring when they came round again seeking admission to their old home, I killed the sparrows which were in possession in order to give the wrens a chance, and they at once took advantage of it and commenced to carry up sticks in their usual industrious manner. They had only enjoyed possession for two days, however, when they were again dislodged. Again the intruders were killed off, and domestic felicity reigned for three days, when a third pair of sparrows came along bent on the same object, and, if possible, more overbearing and determined than their predecessors. This time I thought of a different mode of accomplishing the object in view, and taking down the box at night, nailed a shingle over the end and worked it flush round the edges; with a centre bit a hole was then pierced just large enough to admit the wrens, but too small for the sparrows, and the box was put back in its place. Early in the morning the assault was renewed, but the wrens found at once that they were masters of the situation, and never were two birds more delighted. From his perch aloft the male poured forth torrents of scorn and ridicule, while the female inside the box fairly danced with delight, and I almost fancied was making faces at their enemy as he struggled ineffectually to gain admission, or sullenly, but fruitlessly, tried to widen the aperture.

Shortly after this dispute was settled I noticed ten or twelve sparrows quietly at work at the grape vines, and feeling pleased at the havoc they were apparently making among the insects passed on, speculating mentally on the probable increase of fruit I would have. In the afternoon they had moved to another trellis, and I thought "Well, they are doing the work systematically, and no



doubt effectually." But shortly afterwards, while passing the trellis where they commenced, a slight *debris* of greenery was observed hanging under the vines. This led to an examination which showed, to my intense mortification, that the heart had been eaten out of every fruit bud where the birds had been, and nothing left but the outside leaves. The report of firearms was heard several times in the garden that afternoon; many dead and wounded sparrows were left to the care of the cats, and every crevice where the birds were known to breed closed up at once.

Since then the wrens have kept possession of their box, and with a little attention I can keep the sparrows out of the garden, as they find plenty of provender round the stables; but they are still on the increase, and if this continues in the future as in the past, the time is not far distant when the streets and stable yards will not furnish food enough for the increased numbers, and there is no question but they will then betake themselves to the fields and gardens and take whatever suits them. This is the serious view of the subject which has called for legislation in other countries, and may do so here unless some unexpected check arises to prevent the necessity for it.

In the meantime it is well that all parties having opportunity should take notes of the movements and increase of the birds for future consideration.

One of our most showy birds, and one which seems to enjoy the society of man is the Baltimore Oriole, whose clear, flute like notes are usually heard round our dwelling for the first time in spring about the 8th of May, soon after which the curious purse-like nest may be observed suspended from the slender twigs of a neighboring tree. There are seven different species of orioles peculiar to North America, all of them very handsome birds, and having a general family likeness. Hitherto we have only had the one species with us, but in the spring of 1883 I found that several pairs of the Orchard Orioles were breeding at different points around the city. I was in hopes that this addition to our garden birds would be permanent, but last year not one was noticed. The orchard oriole is the smaller bird of the two, and where the Baltimore is orange, the present species is rich chestnut brown.

Another showy, dashing, familiar bird is the Blue Jay—better known round the farm home than near the city. He is a gay,

rollicking fellow, always ready for plunder or mischief. The greater number move south at the approach of winter, but a few remain in the pine woods, whence they issue on mild days to sun themselves among the tree tops. They are somewhat gregarious in their habits, and even in the breeding season have a custom of going round in guerilla bands of four or five, visiting the farm house in the early morning seeking a chance to suck eggs, and woe betide the unlucky owl whom they happen to come across on any of these excursions; his peace for that day is done, as the excitement is often kept up till darkness forces the Jays to retire.

There is another Jay peculiar to Canada which is not found so far south as Hamilton. This is the Canada Jay, a constant hanger on round the lumber camps, where he picks up bits of meat or other refuse of the table. His taste for *raw* meat is so well known that the lumbermen have given him the name of "Butcher's Boy," "Meat Bird," etc. He is very common in the District of Muskoka, which is his southern limit in this part of the country. This species is strictly confined to the north, and has the singular habit of building its nest during the winter and raising its young as early as March, while the ground is still covered with snow. There are eighteen different Jays described as North American, but the greater number of these are found on the Pacific coast.

The Woodpeckers, as a class, move off before the advance of civilization, and as the country becomes cleared of heavy timber very few are seen. In the district of Muskoka are tracts where the fire has gone through, leaving many large trees killed and going to decay. This is described by my correspondent, Mr. Tisdall, as a perfect paradise for woodpeckers. Here the large black Logcock is quite common, and the Arctic three-toed species are constant residents. The Raven is also frequently seen in this district, and during the winter I saw a fine specimen of the great Cinerous Owl, which was sent down to Hamilton from one of the villages. The owls are not a numerous family, but all those peculiar to the eastern part of the continent have been found near Hamilton, though some of them are of very rare occurrence, the most recent addition being the Barn Owl (*Strex Flammea*), a specimen of which was shot by young Mr. Reid, gardener, near the cemetery, in the spring of 1882. This harmless mouser is believed to be identical with the British bird of the same name, whose history is so strongly colored by super-

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stition;—poets and historians, ancient and modern, uniformly associating his name with evil. In the writings of Shakespeare frequent allusion is made to the owl as a bird of evil repute, thus, when speaking of the omens which preceded the death of Cæsar, it is said that "Yesterday the bird of night did sit even at noonday upon the market-place, hooting and shrieking." And in that memorable midnight ride when Thomas Graham, a farmer of Shanter, was privileged to get a glimpse of the proceedings of a social science meeting of the moving spirits of the time, the poet Burns, in describing the farmer's progress homeward, says that "Kirk allowa was drawin' nigh whaur ghaists and hoolets nichtly cry."

In the rural districts of Scotland where superstition still lingers, the "hoolet" is regarded with aversion, and its visits to the farm house are looked upon as forerunners of disaster to the family. Its cry when heard at night is described as most appalling, and is often referred to in this way in the Literature of the country. Thus, in a song by Tannahill, the fellow townsman and brother poet of Wilson, the hero of the song is entreating admission to the chamber of his lady love, and in describing his uncomfortable position outside, mentions among other causes that the "cry o' hoolets maks me erie." I have listened attentively to the cry of this and other owls, but have not recognized anything so terrifying about them. Not long ago I heard the serenade of the Great Horned Owl down near Stoney Creek, under the mountain. It was loud and harsh, and struck me at the time as resembling more than anything else the neighing of a young colt. Such sounds, when heard unexpectedly at night in a lonely place, are not calculated to inspire courage in a breast already depressed with superstitious fear, but the effect produced must to a great extent depend on the train of thought passing through the mind of the hearer at the time, for though many a stalwart Scot has quailed at the cry of the "hoolet," yet it is a matter of history that the sons of that romantic land, when roused to enthusiasm by similar sounds extorted from the national instrument, have performed deeds of personal valor which will live in song and story so long as poets and historians seek such themes.

In our new country we have no birds of evil omen, and the owl receives his proper place in science and literature. The poet Longfellow speaks of him as "a grave bird; a monk who chants

midnight mass in the great temple of nature.' His visits to the farm house are well understood, and if followed by disaster it is usually to the poultry, or to the bird himself if the farmer's boys have the opportunity

Towards the little Screech Owl the feeling is quite different, When the weather gets severe he frequently takes up his quarters inside the barn, and remains there undisturbed till the weather softens in the spring, when he again betakes himself to the woods. During the day he sits on the crossbeams glowering at the people as they come and go, but at night is most active in the pursuit of mice, which at this season form his favorite fare.

There is no doubt that before the country was settled, the sheltered waters of Burlington Bay was a favorite resting place for the vast crowds of waterfowl which annually pass to and from their breeding places in the north, although now that the Beach is traversed by a railroad, along which trains pass daily at full speed, and the bay is constantly dotted with steam or sailing craft moving around for trade or pleasure, these visits are fewer and of shorter duration than in former years. Gulls, Grebes, Loons and Ducks in large flocks are still observed in spring and fall. In the still summer evenings the bumping sound of the Bittern is frequently heard coming up from the marsh, and the little Bittern is common enough in suitable places all round the bay.

Occasionally Swans and Geese are seen, most frequently in spring about the time the ice is breaking up, and in March, 1884, five white Pelicans spent a short time in the open water near the canal, but such visits are made only by birds who seem bewildered or exhausted by adverse winds, or foggy weather.

In the month of May the bay is visited by flocks of the Velvet Duck (*Melanatta Velvetina*). Their large size and jet black plumage make them conspicuous objects on the water in the bright sunny days of the early summer, yet, strange to say, they are not long here till individuals are noticed dead on the beach, and the number of such increases during their stay till I have counted as many as ten or a dozen in a walk of two miles along the shore. The birds are all in excellent condition, and I have heard no satisfactory cause assigned for the mortality which prevails among them. It seems to be confined to this species, and was first observed two or three years ago;—since that time it has been rather on the

increase. I have not heard of its occurrence elsewhere, which would imply that the birds die from the effects of something which they find in the bay. Whether the paper recently read by Dr. Chittenden on the evil effects of allowing the city sewers to empty themselves into its waters would throw any light on the subject, is a matter well worthy of consideration, for if there is anything being mixed with the water which causes death to the birds, it cannot be conducive to the health of the people.

I have thus glanced but lightly at the history of only a few of the many species of birds to be found around us, but should farther information be at any time wanted regarding any particular species, I have pleasure in referring to the list which will henceforth be in the library of the association, and I hope the time is not far distant when the library will not only contain the *names* of the birds, but preserved specimens of the *birds themselves* will be found within the cabinets in the museum.